

November 1995

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Recommended Citation

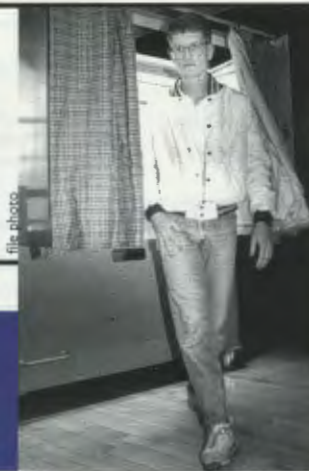
Rahim, Shuva (1995) "Mock Voting Educates About Elections," *Ethos*: Vol. 1996 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol1996/iss2/9>

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INTERVIEW

MOCK VOTING EDUCATES ABOUT ELECTIONS

Mary Youngerman has been the coordinator for the Newspapers in Education program for the *Ames Daily Tribune* for the past three years. She is currently coordinating the efforts of the Iowa Student-Parent Mock Election for the upcoming Iowa Caucus and the '96 Presidential race.



A student exits a voting booth.

e: How did you become interested in conducting mock elections?

MY: A lot of it was my lack of education on voting. I've moved a lot, I always register to vote and I try to vote in every election that's available. But I'll find myself going into the ballot box and having to just say 'I like this name' or 'I kind've heard of this person,' but really not knowing all the way down the ticket line voting. I'm a registered Republican, but I don't believe in voting a straight party ticket. I think that you need to know what the different candidates believe and how they match with what you believe. So, that got me pretty much interested in it. Also, being the coordinator for the Newspapers in Education program, has shown me that newspapers are an up-to-date textbook and really the only textbook that will teach young people to continue learning about the voter education process because they're always going to be up-to-date.

e: How old are the students you aim at to participate in mock elections coordinated by the program?

MY: We aim at kids kindergarten through twelfth grade. *Time* magazine is one of the sponsors. They call this the largest voter education program available in the nation. Congress has billed it as the largest anti-violence program because the philosophy behind it that you're teaching children to go for votes not violence, ballots not bullets. It's getting them to understand that they really do have a voice in their communities and the country, and all it takes is to really get that voter course out and educating them on how small the percentages are overall of people who get out and vote.

e: How did you get involved in coordinating these mock elections?

MY: In 1992, 5 million students across the country took part in the National Student-Parent Mock Election, and the Department of Education was the

whole on this project. They were trying to get it off the ground, but it was unsuccessful. At that time, the national coordinator in the Department of Education decided they needed to find who would volunteer separate from the department. The secretary of state's office was interested, but they could not do it. So, the director of the National Student-Parent Mock Election, Gloria Kirshner, asked if I would do it [for Iowa] in 1994, but they didn't really ask me until the last minute; they asked in August. As it ended up, we got 195 of the 400 school districts to take part and 60,000 students mock voted in that election.

e: How did you get the program started?

MY: I got a steering committee together with some recognizable names, which would be to the program's advantage. We put together a curriculum and a newspaper and made it available free to all students in the state of Iowa. We write the curriculum about things that kids need to know. It's written at a kids' level, but has an interest for adults. They're encouraged to talk to their parents and how they feel about how important an issue is or is not. It's easy in Iowa to vote because there's a lot of things that affect whole families very, very directly, and those have a huge impact.

e: Where are you at this point with the mock election?

MY: 1996 will be our first presidential election, but we're also going to do a project for the [Iowa] Caucus. It'll just be a mock caucus and we are working on the curriculum now for that. The curriculum encourages kids to do a mock straw poll in their classrooms or in their school. Then what we'll do, on Feb. 12, is have a caucus call-in day. We ask them to call in those results during the day on Feb. 12 and we have two major national networks that want to network that on the national evening news. Another thing is that Iowa Public Television has asked if I would do a call-in show at the beginning of December or the beginning of January for students to talk to candidates, and that would be over the fiber optics network so we'd have a live audience in 10 different locations in the five congressional districts.

—by Shuva Rahim